

dred years. No, sir; the people have their eyes open now; they are thinking; and when you come to present this question to them at the polls, they will act, and they will act so as to maintain their past character for honor, justice and integrity.

Mr. EDELEN. I rise not without some degree of embarrassment, to address the House upon the proposition under discussion. I am a stranger to legislative halls. This place knows me for the first time. Whenever I have heretofore essayed my feeble powers of public speaking it has generally been in the forums of justice, before enlightened and impartial courts and juries where the intellect has full, free and unrestrained scope, and where opinions expressed and arguments advanced receive their full and just consideration. Though oftentimes the chances were against me, and my cause almost desperate, still I had the hope to cheer and buoy me up, that victory after all might perchance rest upon my banner. I rise to-day, I regret to say it, under no such encouraging auspices.

Whithersoever I look, wheresoever I turn, I cannot divest myself of the unwelcome reflection that you who lend me your attention do it as a thing of course, as a matter of courtesy, (which I take this occasion to say has always been extended to me, and so far as my observation has gone, to every gentleman on this floor.)

I cannot dismiss the embarrassing thought that the case has already been prejudged and settled. That although I might speak with an eloquence such as never fell from the lips of mortal man, might carry conviction to your minds in breathing thoughts clothed in words that burn. Although I might adduce argument after argument, pile them mountain high, as high as Ossian piled on Pelion, still I cannot reasonably hope to induce one member of the majority side of this House to record his vote against the incorporation of this article in the bill of rights.

Sir, the jury have already agreed upon their verdict, though the clerk hath not yet recorded it. I do not speak unadvisedly and at random on this point. Apart from the intimations that have fallen frequently on my ear from this side of the Hall, on one occasion from the gentlemen from Frederick, (Mr. Schley,) taken up and echoed back by the gentleman from Baltimore city, (Mr. Abbott,) to the effect that they had been sent here by the people of Maryland, charged with the execution of certain work, which they stood willing and prepared to do and to do speedily. The chairman of the committee from Baltimore city, (Mr. Stirling,) in the very able speech made by him a few days since in advocacy of the 4th article of the bill of rights, declared, in answer to some strictures that fell from my honored and venerable friend from Kent, (Mr. Chambers,) that he had no disposition to conceal the fact that these dis-

puted articles now for the first time sought to be incorporated in the organic law of Maryland, had received the sanction of a majority of the committee, and even of a majority of the members of this House, ere they had seen the light of the committee room.

This reflection hangs heavily upon me; it represses that zeal and earnestness which a different state of things is so well calculated to inspire; it paralyzes my energies and makes me almost hesitate to enter the arena of this debate.

I fear, sir, that I engage in a fruitless task, that I embark upon a hopeless mission. Like the seeds that fell by the way-side upon the rocks, and withered and perished, I fear the ideas that may be advanced by me will find no genial soil wherein to vegetate, and will be dried up and consumed among the raging fires of partizan prejudice and hate. When I survey the difficulties that stand in my way I hesitate to enter this unequal contest. But when I recall the words of wisdom addressed in the language of poetry to the timid and faint hearted, I hesitate no longer.

"The wise, the brave,  
When the fierce storms of fortune round them  
    roar,  
Combat the billows with redoubled force;  
Then, if they perish ere the port is gained,  
They sink with decent pride; and from the  
    deep  
Honor retrieves them bright as rising stars."

Sir, I take counsel from the words of the poet; as "the fierce storms of fortune round me roar," I shall "combat the billows with redoubled force," and "if I perish ere the port is gained," as I know I must, I trust I shall at least sink with "decent pride."

Before proceeding to an examination of the question, I must be permitted to express my great surprise and astonishment at the character which this debate has thus far assumed. I had hoped and believed that no one participating in this discussion would have taken the ground which the two gentlemen who have spoken on the majority side of the House have seen fit to occupy.

I was not prepared to bear upon this floor, in the capital of Maryland, such sentiments announced as fell from the lips of the gentleman from Talbot, (Mr. Valliant,) and the gentleman from Caroline, (Mr. Todd.) I had supposed that this question of slavery would have been examined and discussed in its great social, political and material aspects. But the whole burden of the very carefully prepared argument of the gentleman from Talbot, (Mr. Valliant,) was that the institution of slavery was condemned by the Divine Law as contained in both the Old and the New Testaments. The gentleman from Caroline, (Mr. Todd,) in the opening of his speech, announced the distinct proposition